

Troping the Asylum

moved to Toronto in 1836. After a number of years running the family hardware business, he returned to medical practice in 1847 and taught obstetrics and therapeutics in the Toronto School of Medicine. From 1853-75 he was Medical Superintendent of the Provincial Lunatic Asylum, Toronto. Contemporary biographers remark his "literary turn of mind." Nonetheless, while Workman's career is occasionally discussed in an article of the "pioneers of medicine" school, or in a chapter of an unpublished doctoral dissertation, his writings have been virtually ignored.

This is especially unfortunate given the interesting light they cast on the evolution of Workman's attitude to insanity. The thesis, expressed in some (now-dated) doctoral dissertations and articles, that Workman approached mental illness as an essentially physiological disorder, or that he "dismissed the long list of supposed 'moral' agencies to which asylum superintendents in the early part of the nineteenth century had assigned causal primacy" (Tom Brown, *Living with God's Afflicted: A History of the Provincial Lunatic Asylum at Toronto, 166; unpublished ph.d. dissertation, Queen's U, 1980*), obviously needs revision.

All his life Joseph Workman sought the answer to unanswerable questions. Here he translates a work which mocks the arrogance that assumes that one can ever find such answers. Something he thinks his colleagues could learn a lot from.

Note that in his long lifetime Dr. Workman dissected hundreds of cadavers, male and female alike, but the object of this post-mortem is deliberately female, because it stands for things traditionally associated with women: the muses, genius, and the soul. We leave it to you to decide what it stands for exactly.

Dr. Workman must have delighted, in the last years of his life, in satirizing, in this Wonderful Post-Mortem, the futility of looking for truth where it cannot be found, while not looking at it where it already is. We hope you like it too.]